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Automated System Helps Guantanamo Guards Track Detainees

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NAVAL BASE GUANTANAMO BAY, Cuba, Feb. 17, 2005 -- An automated system helps guards at the U.S. detention facility here keep track of terror war detainees and has cut down exponentially on paperwork.

Army Brig. Gen. Jay Hood, commander of Joint Task Force Guantanamo, said the Detainee Information Management System "allows us to keep track of nearly every aspect of a detainee's daily life."

Devised two years ago by two Army Reserve officers assigned here, the automated system tracks information on individual detainees, cells and cellblocks. Leaders also use it to post messages to the guards and changes to the detention facility's standard operating procedures.

DIMS is managed from Camp Delta's Detention Operations Center, which Army Sgt. 1st Class James Webb called "the brain of the camp." Webb, an Army Reserve military police officer from Michigan, explained that the system allows guards and officers to view information on a variety of categories broken down by camp, cellblock, cell or detainee.

Different information reported by cellblock includes number of detainees assigned, number present, and if medical personnel or other visitors have been on the block or are scheduled to be on the block.

"This is what the block (noncommissioned officer) or anybody on the block sees when they come on shift," Webb explained. "They can find out who they have on their block and what they can expect possibly from that block."

Information on individuals is listed by numbers assigned to track the detainees. Information kept on each detainee includes his country of origin, the types of comfort items he's allowed, and medical and behavioral notes.

The system also tracks detainee refusals and requests. If a detainee refuses a meal, a shower or medication, a note of that is made in DIMS. Detainee requests are processed through DIMS and can include requests to see a Red Cross representative, a chaplain, an interrogator, a psychiatric technician, the camp librarian or an interpreter.

Requests for medical care don't go through DIMS, Webb said. When a detainee requests medical care, the block NCO will phone the Detention Operations Center and officials there will request medical assistance by radio, he said.

Another section of DIMS, the journal, keeps track of significant activities and noteworthy events in each cellblock. For instance, if a Navy medical specialist has visited a cellblock, the journal entry might say "Corpsman on block," Webb said.

Navy corpsmen generally pass through each block every two days and are available whenever a detainee requests assistance or a guard notices a detainee might need assistance.

Cell maintenance issues are also recorded in DIMS. On a recent day, maintenance notes on DIMS included "Low water pressure in sink" and "Toilet running." Webb explained detainees are removed from cells during maintenance and that "the vast majority" of maintenance issues are resolved within 24 hours.

DIMS terminals are located at the end of each cellblock. Before they were installed, guards would have to come out of the cellblock and submit a written report to the sergeant of the guard. The SOG would then get the report to the Detention Operations Center, and it would be directed through appropriate channels from there. Webb estimated the various reporting procedures generated thousands of pieces of paper a day.

With DIMS, guards record their information using a series of dropdown menus and have an opportunity to type short notes when they submit information.

The system is a "significantly better way to track what is going on with the men under our charge than the reams of paperwork that would be required if we did not have that automated system," Hood said.

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